

Opening Statement
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Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
Hearing on "America and Asia in a Changing World"
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On behalf of the Subcommittee, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our exceptionally distinguished panel of witnesses. We sincerely appreciate your appearance before us and look forward to your remarks and the dialogue to follow.

I should note that Chairman Hyde had planned to be with us this morning to offer his insights and perspective on several of the key issues facing the United States in Asia, but that scheduling conflicts ultimately prevented his appearance. We regret not being able to gain from his wisdom and experience in these matters, but we understand the demands of his schedule.

The purpose of today's hearing is to review the main strands of U.S. policy in Asia and the Pacific, with goal of seeking something in the nature of a net assessment of our current and future strategic prospects in this vast and dynamic region.

Before turning to our witnesses, I would like to make a few brief comments.

Despite the urgency of multiple crises confronting America in the Middle East, it is my belief that it is in Asia where the United States will face its largest geopolitical challenges in the years ahead. It is in this context that the most important bilateral relationship of the 21st Century will be between China and the United States; and that the most important regional relationship will be between America, China, a hopefully unified Korea, and Japan. Attentive American concern, continued engagement, and steady U.S. leadership are vital if peace and prosperity are to be preserved in this historic cockpit of great power conflict.

With respect to North Korea, there are few parallels in history in which the U.S. has found itself with a less appealing menu of options than with the DPRK. Pyongyang's ongoing nuclear program, its missile tests and illicit exports have profound implications for regional stability, the international nonproliferation regime, and the national security of the United States. But as perplexing as our options are, it is increasingly difficult to resist the conclusion that our approach toward North Korea during the past few years has been marked by a lack of strategic imagination, most acutely reflected in a stubborn aversion to bilateral diplomacy.

I agree with those voices who insist that the United States should be principled and consistent in its approach to North Korea. But ours should be a consistency of pragmatism, not dogmatism. In this regard, deterrence and engagement are not mutually exclusive. Even in the face of DPRK provocations, the U.S. can afford to be bold in its diplomacy with North Korea. The Six Party process is a good framework, but it is likely to be bolstered rather than undercut if we augment it with bilateral initiatives.

In South Asia, it strikes me that this is an extraordinary time of opportunity for the United States. Never before have we been so positively engaged in the region on such a wide variety of important economic, political, and people-to-people initiatives.

The most difficult long-term challenge will be to maintain constructive relations with the two most populous states in the region, India and Pakistan. There is virtually no dissent in Washington from the precept that a rising India and the U.S. are natural partners with compelling incentives over time to cooperate closely on a host of regional and global concerns. With respect to Pakistan, it is likewise self-evident that our relationship must be based on more than cooperation in the campaign against terrorism, and that our objective is the establishment of a lasting economic and strategic partnership. President Musharraf will be meeting with the Committee later this afternoon, and we look forward to hearing in detail his plans for combating a resurgent Taliban and other extremist groups, as well as in the political realm the outlook for what we hope will be credible democratic elections in 2007.

Finally, Southeast Asia has been thrust back into the headlines with the deeply distressing news this week of a military-led coup in Thailand. My sense is that Washington and the world were genuinely shocked by this stunning development, based on the assumption that political differences, however stark, would ultimately be resolved by the Thai people in a peaceful and democratic way.

Thailand is a close friend and ally of the United States in a region which remains integral to United States interests, and for the sake of our bilateral relations, as well as for the aspirations of the Thai people, I would urge the coup leaders to restore constitutional democratic rule as swiftly as possible.
